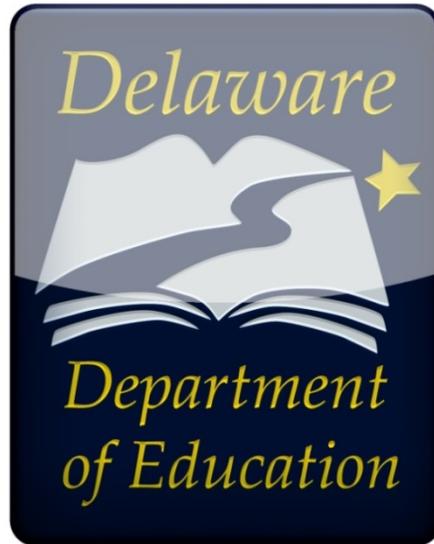


CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Delaware Design-Lab High School

**MAJOR MODIFICATION APPLICATION
INITIAL REPORT**

CSAC Initial Meeting: January 24, 2018
CSAC Initial Report Published: February 5, 2018

On December 30, 2017, Delaware Design-Lab High School submitted an application for a major modification of its charter.

The following were in attendance at the Initial Meeting of the Charter School Accountability Committee (CSAC) on January 24, 2018:

Voting Committee Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Karen Field Rogers, Chairperson of the Charter School Accountability Committee, Deputy Secretary, DDOE
- Kimberly Krzanowski, Director, Office of Early Learning, DDOE
- Amy Baker-Sheridan, Education Associate, Academic Supports, DDOE
- Tracy Neugebauer, Education Associate, Exceptional Children Resources, DDOE
- Charles Taylor, Head of School, Providence Creek Academy
- Chandra Pitts, CEO, One Village Alliance, Community Member
- Maria Stecker, Education Associate, Educator Evaluation, Educator Effectiveness & Talent Management Workgroup, DDOE

Non-voting Members of the Charter School Accountability Committee

- Donna Johnson, Executive Director, Delaware State Board of Education
- Kendall Massett, Executive Director, Delaware Charter School Network

Staff to the Committee (Non-voting)

- Catherine Hickey, Deputy Attorney General, Counsel to the Committee
- Denise Stouffer, Lead Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- John Carwell, Education Associate, Charter School Office, DDOE
- Brook Hughes, Education Associate, Financial Reform and Resource Management
- Sheila Kay-Lawrence, Administrative Secretary, Charter School Office, DDOE

Representatives of Delaware Design-Lab High School

- Rebecca Collins, Interim Executive Director
- Melissa Siwiec, Project Manager
- Paul Miller, Board Chair (via teleconference)
- Michelle Lambert, Accountant (via teleconference)

Additional Attendees Noted

- Jen Roussell, Administrative Secretary, Operations Support, DDOE

Discussion

Delaware Design-Lab High School (“Design-Lab”) has applied for a modification to decrease the school’s authorized enrolment by 15%. Ms. Collins provided a brief overview of the school’s previous modification application. She noted that the school completed school year 2016-17 under budget and did not draw down on its line of credit.

Ms. Collins stated that school successfully completed a RFP process and contracted the University of Delaware to be the school’s design thinking provider. University of Delaware has been onsite daily providing professional development to teachers to ensure that they understand design thinking and that it is embedded in the curricula.

Ms. Collins stated that the remaining untrained Board members and Citizens Budget Oversight Committee member have been trained in accordance with State regulations for both board governance and financial training. She said this information is reflected in the school’s annual report. Ms. Collins also stated that the school successfully completed Prongs I and II of their Special Education Audit.

Ms. Collins stated that when the school’s charter application was approved, the enrollment target was for 750 students. She added that a modification application was approved to reduce the enrollment the first year and then to build it back up. She stated that next school year (2018-19), the school is authorized to enroll 550 students. She also stated that the school’s current enrollment is 298. Ms. Collins noted that the current facility cannot accommodate 550 students. She added that the school has explored expansion of its existing facility and the estimated costs is \$1.5 million. She stated that the school’s lease ends this year and the Board of Directors is not interested in spending \$1.5 million to renovate a leased facility. She stated that she concluded that 550 students is not achievable.

Ms. Collins shared the school’s master schedule for next semester. She stated that the school is currently staffed for 350 students. She added that the school is financially viable at 298 students enrolled this year. She also noted that the master schedule reflects that every teacher has an 80-minute daily planning period. Ms. Collins referenced the 5-year budget projection that was submitted with the application and noted column 1, line 3 which showed -\$196,135. She explained that this amount reflects invoices from last fiscal year that were not received until this fiscal year. She also noted that the budget does not include any funding from the XQ award. She noted that the XQ award is a separate pool of funds designated for creating a “Super School.”

Ms. Field Rogers asked members of the CSAC whether there were any questions, comments, or feedback related to the enrollment change. Mr. Taylor asked how the school planned to proceed with 298 students for the next 3 years. Ms. Collins stated that based on the school’s current enrollment, applications pending for next year and historical attrition rates, enrollment is projected to be 322 students or 92% of the proposed authorized enrollment (350). Mr. Taylor asked the school to describe its recruitment and retention efforts. Ms. Siwec stated that in addition to a marketing strategy that includes a social media campaign, billboards and ads, the primary retention strategy is to provide stability. She explained that the school has come through changes in its organizational structure and the departure of the school’s founders. She also noted that

investments from the XQ grant will add exciting new initiatives (e.g. design thinking, dual-enrollment) that will draw new students.

Mr. Taylor asked the school to briefly describe one of the school's recruitment and/or retention initiatives. Ms. Siwiec stated that one of the school's initiatives is to prepare all teachers to deliver instruction in accordance with the Design Thinking model. She added that this effort helps to fulfill the school's mission and prepares students to apply design thinking in their professional and personal lives. Ms. Collins stated that this school year, 22 students are taking dual enrollment courses at the University of Delaware. She also noted that the school provides online credit recovery courses for students who need to retake courses. Ms. Collins stated that the school has also established the "Making Change Committee" which targets disengaged students during club time to identify issues and facilitate student-driven solutions. She added that the school will be adding three new career pathways next year: Architecture and Engineering, Entrepreneurship and Media and Design to recruit and retain students.

Ms. Pitts asked the school to describe the school's enrollment trends since the school opened and whether the modification reflects past trends. Ms. Collins stated that the school opened with approximately 130 students in grade 9 and approximately 75 students in grade 10. She added that the students who entered in grade 10 are now seniors (57) and the students who entered in grade 9 are now juniors (122). Ms. Collins noted that attrition was higher than expected due to substantial management turnover and instability. She commented that increased stability and new initiatives will reduce the attrition rates. Ms. Collins stated that the 9th grade attrition rate was significantly lower than the 10th grade attrition rate despite the organizational instability. Ms. Pitts asked the school about the difference in the attrition rate between grades 9 and 10. Ms. Collins stated that the students in grade 10 were more likely to switch schools because they had already had one switch previously. She also noted that the first incoming class may not have fully understood the mission, vision and Design Thinking teaching approach.

Ms. Pitts asked the school to provide the maximum number of students the current facility can safely accommodate considering that the facility is not currently designed to safely accommodate 550 students. Ms. Collins stated that the 550 enrollment projection was based on a substantial expansion of the facility. She added that the Board and management of the school were different at the time and had a different vision for the school. Ms. Collins also noted that the current facility, which includes a main building and an annex, can comfortably accommodate a maximum enrollment of 350 students.

Ms. Johnson noted that the 12th grade English Language Arts (ELA) class is taught by a substitute teacher. Ms. Collins stated that the former ELA teacher left in the middle of the school year and the school has not been successful in hiring a replacement. She added that a long-term substitute has been hired and the school's academic coaching consultant provides direct support to the classroom. She added that a certified special education teacher also provides support.

Ms. Field Rogers noted that, if approved, the statute does not permit the modification to be made retroactive to July 1, 2017. Ms. Collins agreed to change the effective date, if approved, to July 1, 2018. Ms. Field Rogers stated that a lot of the school operations are covered by the XQ grant but the grant does not appear to be included on the State accounting system. She asked the school to

explain how staff are being paid. Ms. Collins stated that there are three positions: the XQ Project Manager, the Dean of Academic Intensity position and the Career and College Readiness position which is separate from the guidance counselor. Ms. Field Rogers noted that these positions appeared to be principals and counselors who are core to the school. She added that the school could operate without these positions. Ms. Lambert stated that the school transfers funds quarterly into First State Financials (FSF) to reimburse with grant funds. She also stated that the school completes a quarterly reconciliation of the salaries paid which are attributable to the grant and transfers grant funds to FSF to reimburse for funds paid out of local funds.

Conclusion

Ms. Field Rogers asked the individual voting members of CSAC to specifically identify any follow-up or clarifying information or documentation that they feel is necessary to properly evaluate the Major Modification request.

None were stated.

Next Steps:

- On or before February 5, 2018, the CSAC will issue an Initial Report addressing the information reviewed and discussed at the CSAC Initial Meeting.
- The first of two public hearings will be held on February 13, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. at the EastSide/Charter School of New Castle Administrative Building, 1101 Delaware Street, New Castle, DE.
- The school will have an opportunity to respond to the CSAC's Initial Report. The school's response is due on or before February 20, 2018.
- The second and Final Meeting of the CSAC will be held on March 7, 2018 at 1:00 p.m., Department of Education, 401 Federal Street, 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Dover, DE.
- On or before March 20, 2018, the CSAC will issue a Final Report, which will include its recommendation on the Major Modification Application.
- The second and Final Public Hearing will be held on April 4, 2018 at 5:00 p.m., Department of Education, 401 Federal Street, 2nd Floor Cabinet Room, Dover, DE 19901.
- The public comment period ends on April 5, 2018.
- The Secretary of Education will announce her decision at the April 19, 2018, State Board of Education meeting.